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ABSTRACT

Strategic planning is a process designed to move an educational organization through the steps of understanding changes in the external environment, assessing organizational strengths and weaknesses, developing a vision of a desired future and ways to achieve that mission, developing and implementing specific plans, and motivating that implementation so that necessary changes can be made. This paper examines strategic planning, differentiates it from traditional planning, and explains why it is necessary. Strategic planning does not eliminate the need for traditional planning functions; instead, it provides a planning framework and requires more time for planners or stakeholders to become part of the process so the resulting plan will be theirs and the potential for conflict is reduced. Strategic planning must also consider demographic, educational, economic, political, and social issues affecting a particular school district. For example, in California, the ethnic, aging, and poverty-level populations are growing, and traditional family structure is changing dramatically. Redwood City Elementary School faces a dropout problem that will require reducing class size, developing early intervention programs, expanding cooperative learning, providing special staff development, and creating latchkey and extended day programs. Each of these responses requires an action plan, a specific timetable, and a responsible person to carry it out. Strategic planning's five phases are summarized and a rationale for faithfully proceeding through all phases is provided. (MLH)

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STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

A Presentation for the
California School Boards Association
Annual Conference
Moscone Center
San Francisco, California

December 11, 1987

by
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and
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CSBA presentation: Strategic Planning for School Districts

To *plan* is to form a scheme or a method for doing or achieving something.

We are here today to talk about planning for school districts, a primary responsibility of the top management of any organization.

To *manage* is to direct or conduct the affairs or interests of; to control the direction.

School Board members are elected by their communities to represent their interests in the management of the public school system. Our roles are complex and multidimensional, but one of our primary responsibilities is to insure the survival and development of the public school system as a whole and in particular, the district we serve.

We aren't strangers to planning, those of us who have served on Boards of Education. We are very familiar with the process of developing yearly goals and objectives to help us set priorities for programs and for budgets. We are used to trying to define the current state of affairs in our districts and then to figure out how to make them better. All of us in California have had to get accustomed to the yearly budget battles at the state level since the passage of Prop 13. The outcome of this battle decides the COLA and that decides how much money we will receive from the state to funds our district programs. Each of us has experienced the results of difficult labor-management relations or the impact of factors sych as increasing or declining student enrollment. We have felt the frustration of having to *react* to conditions beyond our control which negatively affect the way we want to educate the students in our schools. Today we want to tell you about how to manage school districts in a pro-active manner, a way which allows us to make good decisions based on sound data and thorough process. A way which will allow us to closely match the programs in our schools to the actual needs of our community. We are here to talk about strategic planning in schools.

What is strategic planning? How does it differ fron traditional planning? What makes a plan strategic? Why is it needed? These are the questions we will consider.

In the early 1980's, an educational reform movement was begun by state governors. This movement asked the question "how do we improve schools?" An example of this approach is the effective school research which focuses on how to make traditional schools function better. This research laid the foundation for reform, but it was not adequate to meet the needs of the future. Now we are in the second phase of reform and we can begin to ask the restructuring question " given the changes in our society and the current needs of people, what kind of an institution is needed?"

Now, the definition of strategic planning: it is a process that is designed to move an educational organization through the steps of understanding changes in the external environment, assessing the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization, developing a vision of the desired future for the organization and some ways to achieve that mission, developing specific plans to get the organization from where it is to where is wants to be, implementing these plans and monitoring that implementation so that necessary changes or modifications can be made.

Strategic planning differs from traditional and long range planning in its use of environmental scanning and its openess to a critical examination of the need for doing things differently than they have been done in the past, in order to meet the constantly changing conditions of the information society in which we are living.

Program improvement: how to do better what we are already doing (effective school research)

Program restructuring: how to change the system to meet the needs of a rapidly changing internal and external environment

Strategic planning does not eliminate the need for traditional planning functions. Rather, it provides a framework for the total planning process. Strategic planning answers the question "where are we going?" It must include plans to decide "how are we getting there?" (the program planning part of strategic planning) and "what do we do to get there?" (the program delivery portion of the plan.)

Strategic planning is a slower process than traditional planning approaches. Sufficient time must be taken for affected and interested parties (stakeholders) to become a part of the process so that the resulting plan will be their plan and the potential for conflict and disagreement is reduced. A district should aim to have a plan written after a year to eighteen months. Implementation plans will take at least three months and you can expect full implementation in about two years.

Strategic planning is an effective way for a district to plan change, to provide the organization with a direction and purpose, to manage the achievement of the defined goals of the organization, to think strategically, to organize staff development and to involve the community in an educational partnership.

Why strategic planning?

Successful companies in the business world have used strategic planning by looking at changes in the market place and responding to those changes.The most successful companies (Apple Computer and Hewlett Packard) are the ones who can adapt to the changing environment and predict some of the changes that take place based on the trends that they see. Bureaucratic organizations which are slow to respond to changing needs are just not making it.

Educational organizations are beginning to recognize that in order to keep up with the rapid changes in today's world, and to provide students with the tools they will need to be successful in the next century, they are going to have to change the way they plan to include information about the world around them. They cannot isolate themselves and pretend that education is unrelated to changing families, to immigration, to technological advances, and to the job market. Strategic planning gives school districts a tool, a process that they can use to prudently manage their resources and change their structure to meet the requirements of students now and in the future.

Pat Brown and I began the process by beginning to collect some data for school districts in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties while we were taking a class in School Board Leadership at the University of Santa Clara. We collected information on conditions in the local area that might have an impact on education. As we collected the data we began to recognize some significant trends that did have an impact on education. We collected information in five major areas:

Demographic issues (enrollments, population shifts)
Educational issues (effective school studies, curriculum, etc.)
Economic issues (jobs, housing, transportation)
Political issues (legislation, inter-agency cooperation)
Social issues (aging, child care, crime, health, poverty)

I'd like to share with you some of the general trends and data that we collected and then show you how we used some of that information to plan for activities in the district:

By the year 2010, a majority of the California population will be composed of ethnic minorities.

The # of Hispanics and Asians will double in next 30 years
25% of the nation's immigrants are settling in California
At a recent presentation by a San Francisco State geographer it was projected that California will be 2/3 minority by 2030! or ... 38% Anglo.

Aging population growing

As a result of the baby boom (1946 - 1964) and the baby bust (1964 - 1978), we now are experiencing the "echo baby boom" = a growing # of older citizens and a growing # of children.
In 1950 17 workers supported each person receiving social security.
By 1992 only 3 workers will support each retiree - and 1/3 of them will be minority.

Traditional family structure is changing dramatically.

Only 4% of families are traditional (Mom, Dad, two children, 1 dog)

By 1990 80% of children under age 6 will have mothers working outside the home.

Stability of family life will decrease as a result of divorce, single parent families, etc.

1983 - 23% of all children lived in single parent families.

A recent survey in our middle schools in R.C. indicated that 50% of our children were from single parent families.

In 91% of them the head of the household was female.

Number of persons living below the poverty level is increasing

1980 - 1/6 children under 6 lived in poverty.

By 2000 1/3 children will live in poverty. The majority of poor in America are children.

Shocking health statistics

Growing number of teenage pregnancies.

14% of all teenage girls in California become pregnant

Every day 40 teenagers give birth to their 3rd child. 43% of female dropouts do so because of pregnancy.

Teen suicide a growing problem

5000 commit suicide every year

500,000 attempt it!

Jobs in an information society will be different

By 1990 75% of all jobs will require training beyond high school

1 / 2 jobs today didn't exist 10 years ago

More women will be in the work force

1982 - 53% women employed.

Earning power of women is still only .61 for each $1.00 earned by men.

What do all of these trends mean for your districts? You need to validate if these trends are affecting your particular area and begin to talk about what the trends might mean for your district.

If your enrollment is increasing you might need to consider changing boundaries, exploring year round schools, building additional classroom space, and/or putting classrooms in local businesses.

If your minority enrollment is increasing you might need to develop bilingual education programs for students whose primary language is not English, and/or newcomer centers for students who have not had school experiences.

If the drug and alcohol abuse in your community is consistent with the rise in larger society you might want to develop a realistic health education curriculum and help students adjust to stress.

If the senior population is growing in your area you might increase direct contacts between your schools and the community, maintain school sites as community centers serving a broad age range, serve meals to seniors in your school cafeterias and encourage seniors to attend school with children.

If your drop out rate is significant you might want to look at alternative programs for students, pursue cooperative learning in the classroom, provide more counseling services for students and establish peer counseling programs.

If your teaching staff is growing older you might want to provide more staff development to give them some new skills, offer some early retirement incentives, and make arrangements to exchange personnel with businesses.

Probably one of the most interesting parts of the process is to gather your staffs and communities together and talk about the trends that are out there and then begin to brainstorm together about what you think the impact of those trends might be on your district.Then you need to consider what the **implications** of those trends are for your particular district.

In Redwood City Elementary we've been trying to decide how best to communicate what we are doing to the greater community. If we give them all of the data they will be overwhelmed, as we have often felt and you may feel now, so we thought it would be best to show what has happened in one area as a result of the strategic planning process.

One of the **issues** for us is an enormous and apparently growing school drop-out program. **Implications** for us are as follows: (1) we'll need a flexible program with high expectations. (2) We'll need support programs in place at an early age. (3) We'll need staff development to enable professional staff to deal with complex student needs. (4) We'll need to prepare for more children with special needs. (5) We'll need to provide for more child care and latchkey programs.

The **district response** to these implications includes lowering class size, developing early intervention programs, expanding cooperative learning, providing staff development dealing with strategies for teaching children with special needs, increasing child development center services, providing for special needs of immigrant students, and encouraging more inter-agency cooperation to develop latchkey and extended day programs. For each of these responses there is an action plan with a specific timeline for accomplishing them and a particular person responsible for carrying them out.

What can be the board member's role in the strategic planning process? We can stand around and wring our hands and talk about not being able to accomplish what we would like..... or we can look at what we've got, decide where we want to go based on the projected trends for the future, figure out how to get there, prioritize what we want to accomplish, and begin to move forward and make some progress.There may be some limitations to what we can do, but there are no limitations of what our vision can be for what we want to do!

Strategic planning can be organized into five general phases of effort which include:

1. creating a basis for planning and change
2. developing the written plan
3. developing implementation plans
4. implementing and monitoring the plans
5. renewing the plan on a regular basis

Phase 1 is extremely important. The two basic activities which must take place are environmental scanning (internal and external) and community and staff education and involvement (stakeholder input).

Phase 2 includes the formulation of a group of 12-18 people who must consider the data which has been collected and then develop a preliminary strategic plan. Because the plan will be the framework for district policy, the board members must be involved in this process in a meaningful way. The plan they develop must be relatively simple and should include a section which addresses community and school needs, assumptions about the future and primary district beliefs or values, a mission, which is the ideal purpose or vision around which people can organize their energies and strategic goals which are the large tasks necessary to to the accomplishment of the vision. The strategic plan, remember, is the umbrella for the detailed implementation plans. It should provide a clear sense of direction for all district activities.

Phase 3 is the expansion of the planning process to the various groups within the district. This includes central departments, as well a local school sites. Implementation planning specifies how the vision and goals are to be achieved. The primary issue at this point in the process is to insure the alignment of the strategic plan and the various department or school plans.

Phase 4 focuses on staff development and the collection of data for the monitoring of the progress of the plan.

Phase 5 recognizes that even the best plans must be validated and renewed on a regular basis. The evaluation should include a review of the progress to date, an analysis of problems encountered and the design of steps needed to ensure continued progress.
It is important to recognize that a strategic plan is never static; it cannot be written once and forgotten. It is a way of managing an organization to make that organization responsive to a constantly changing internal and external environment. It is a way of guaranteeing the survival of the institution and maintaining its relevance.

The primary values stressed in strategic planning are:

the development of information systems for decision making
a common sense of direction
linkages among district systems

Why do we need to go through all of these phases?

One of the greatest values of the whole process is the time that is spent together talking about what you want for children, struggling together with the data collected, trying to come to some consensus about what the trends are, and deciding what the district response should be to those trends.

The environmental scanning can include everyone in the process. Put the scissors next to your morning paper and start cutting out articles that you think might influence schools. There's always something on the population trends, on the status of immigration, on the cost of housing, on the changing job market, on the growing AIDS crisis, plight of the homeless, etc....

Once you get started and start sharing what you collect with your colleagues everyone starts collecting themselves and you read the paper with a different emphasis. Call Sacramento and ask for reports that have been prepared for the legislature. The PACE materials from the University of California are full of current information about enrollments and educational issues. Census reports in the library tell you more than you want to know!

Once you've gathered some information you need to start sharing it with staffs and raising their awareness of the forces that are affecting schools. We had a couple of days with our administrative staff sharing the data and brainstorming together about what it all means for us. You can't just tell everyone what is happening and what needs to be done. **Staffs are experienced at ignoring administrative directives.** If they have a direct involvement on the committees and task forces they will have some ownership of what happens.

Developing the **mission statement** took us two days of struggling together, defining each word, negotiating ... We are pleased with the results of our efforts and the statement is now hanging in every office in the district.

> THE REDWOOD CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT WILL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY TO HELP YOUTH DEVELOP A POSITIVE VISION OF THE FUTURE AND ACQUIRE THE ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS NECESSARY TO BECOME SUCCESFUL, CONTRIBUTING PARTICIPANTS IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD.

By the time we were through we all felt that we had played an important role in the process. Our team consisted of Board members, administrative staff, custodian (President of the CSEA, and one of the most articulate members of the team!)

We're still figuring out how to share our progress with the greater community. We are developing a packet with an overhead presentation that will share some of the data and then explain what it all means for us, and what it means to teachers, and particularly to students.

Staff development is critical. Some teachers probably think that we're going through a phase and if they wait long enough "this too will pass". New board members need to be given all of the information and be given an opportunity to understand what you've done and why you've done it.

The real question that needs to be asked is "Is it making a difference in the classrooms?" "Are students being impacted in a positive way by what we've done?" **Validation and continual monitoring** to make sure that the activities are being implemented are essential. We have to be able to show that it does make a difference ... that we do have a mission ... and that all of our activities do fit into our mission.

The school site plans allow the individual school sites to develop their own plans and they need to recognize what the direction of the district is. I'm pleased to report that the district responses that we intended to address the growing dropout problem are actually happening. For each activity there is an action plan with a timeline that lists what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and who is responsible for making sure that it gets done.

Strategic Planning has given us a focus and allows us to get more accomplished, rather than just reacting to crisis or spinning our wheels in many different directions.